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Agenda item 11 (d)

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS:
INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY, ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE, IMPUNITY

Written statement submitted by the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 April 1999]

GE.99-12580 (E)

Road death and injury - a major, worldwide, public health and human rights issue

1. This submission is intended to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to a huge group of people, whose numbers grow daily, who experience the sudden, violent deaths of their loved ones, often their children, or life-changing injury, and whose plight receives little, if any recognition: road traffic victims.

2. Worldwide, every year between 700,000 and 1 million people are killed, and many millions more bereaved, 2 million are permanently disabled and 20 million are injured - a truly war-like casualty toll. A recent study by WHO, the Red Cross and the Harvard School of Public Health has projected that if present trends continue, by 2020 road death and injury will become the third biggest cause of death and injury worldwide, moving from its present ninth place in just 20 years.

3. It is clear that road death and injury presents a major public health problem for every country in the world. The socio-economic costs are enormous: US$ 1,000 billion every year, a sum equivalent to the annual worldwide production cost of cereals.

4. The fact that so many people die needlessly, that so very many suffer injury with ruined lives as a consequence, that the young, the old and the feeble-bodied are at particular disadvantage and risk, will be a matter of grave concern to the Commission. So far, more than 25 million people have been killed on the roads worldwide, with innumerable millions disabled and injured.

5. The scale is not the only problem which must be of concern: of grave concern also must be the widespread leniency shown by the legal system to road traffic offenders and the casual attitude demonstrated by most agencies dealing with road traffic victims. These not only contribute to the carnage continuing, and even worsening, but also cause great suffering and hardship to the majority of road traffic victims.

6. A 1997 study by the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims, "Impact of Road Death and Injury", found that the majority of victims suffered a substantial drop in their quality of life and living standards for long periods, often permanently, following injury or bereavement through a road crash. The frequently derisory sentences against traffic violators prevent the adequate application of preventative safety measures and is the reason for the toll continuing and even increasing.

7. We request the Commission on Human Rights to consider this situation under item 11 (d) of the agenda of the present session, in order to ensure that insurance companies, civil justice and social assistance institutions provide the necessary assistance to road traffic victims, especially the disabled, who at present often receive inadequate assistance and compensation, often leading to great hardship and making it impossible for them to lead a dignified existence.

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